

Your Best Feet Forward

High blood glucose associated with diabetes can cause nerve damage and poor blood circulation in the feet, leading to serious foot problems. Manfred Mak, podiatrist, Singapore General Hospital, reports.

Individuals with diabetes often have foot related complications. With damaged nerves in the feet, one might experience pain or a lessened ability to feel heat, cold and pain. The lack of ability to feel with your feet is dangerous. You might have a cut or a sore on your feet without noticing it. If untreated, it may become infected.

Wearing an ill-fitting shoe can also cause excessive rubbing on the skin leading to blisters, calluses and corns. People with diabetes might not be able to notice these problems due to the lack of feeling in their feet. Poor blood circulation in people with diabetes also means that any wounds that develop will take a longer time to heal, making it more prone to infection.

Fungal foot infection is very common in people with diabetes, often causing changes to skin and toenails. Fungal foot infection may appear as dry and flaky skin or in some cases, as blisters on the feet. It is not uncommon for fungus to appear between the toes, usually in the space between the fourth and fifth toe. Toenails may thicken and be difficult to manage.

Untreated fungal infection on the skin can potentially lead to secondary bacteria infections. Treatment for fungal foot infection can be a long process. However, drying your feet thoroughly after a wash is a simple and effective measure to prevent fungal foot infection. Various medications to treat fungal foot infection are available. Check with your doctor or podiatrist before starting any form of treatment.

FOOTCARE TIPS

Check your feet daily for cuts, sores, bruises, blisters and calluses on your feet. Use your hand to feel for them. If you are unable to bend over or pull your feet towards you to check them; use a mirror. If you are unable to see well, ask someone check them for you.

Always wear slippers or shoes to prevent injuries to the feet. Wear a slipper or shoe even when you are indoors. Avoid walking barefoot.

Wear socks or stockings to prevent blisters on the feet. Avoid wearing tight socks and stocking that may restrict blood flow to the feet. Change socks and hosiery daily.

Ensure that shoes fit properly as improper footwear may cause problems such as toe deformities, blisters, sores and calluses. Covered shoes should have sufficient length, width and depth. Toes should not be squashed; you should be able to wriggle your toes and there should be one thumb space in the front, from the longest toe.

Check footwear before wearing them for small stones, loose threads, sharp edges and foreign objects that might injure your feet before putting them on.

Cut nails straight across and not too short, preferably after a bath when they are soft. Improper cutting of toenails may lead to ingrown toenails that may cause pain and infection. If toenails are hard to manage, filing them with a nail file is a safer alternative. Visit your podiatrist if you have difficulty managing your own toenails.

Do not use any sharp objects on your feet, such as a sharp blade to remove calluses and corns. Corn plasters contain an acid with can be dangerous to a diabetic foot. Instead, file off calluses with a pumice stone or emery board. Visit your doctor or podiatrist if you are unsure or encounter any difficulty.

Apply moisturiser regularly as people with diabetes tend to have dry skin, especially on their feet because of nerve damage. Apply a thin layer of moisturiser to your feet at least once a day after you wash and dry them. Avoid applying between the toes as extra moisture may lead to skin infections.

